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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001186

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: MANDALAY ACTIVISTS MANAGE TO PERSEVERE

Classified By: APAO Kim Penland for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Charge met in Mandalay on October 7 with NLD senior organizer Win Mya Mya, the leadership of YMCA, and toured the Phaung Daw Oo Monastery high school. These activists report that the government has made it increasingly difficult to operate within Mandalay and the surrounding villages. The government has also restricted NLD meetings, begun a covert campaign to pit Muslims against Buddhists within the party, and boarded up NLD signboards notifying the public of the location of three different offices. END SUMMARY.

Win Mya Mya Continues to Stand Up to Government

2. (C) Win Mya Mya is the spokesperson for the NLD in Mandalay and comes from a staunch family of NLD supporters. In the May 30, 2003 Depayin attack, when she was 55-years-old, government thugs broke both her arms. She still bears a six inch scar on her left arm, and she no longer has full use of her right hand. Although she has been arrested and re-imprisoned almost every year since 2001, she continues to be an outspoken dissident who often defies the regime outright. Her family owns a number of tailor shops which have become informal gathering points for citizens who wish to see or communicate with her. The government regularly visits these shops to tell her employees and customers not to gather. These warnings have increased in frequency so that people have begun to exercise more caution, but according to Win Mya Mya, they still find ways to quietly inform her about the activities of various groups.

3. (C) Win Mya Mya told the Charge that government pressure has increased in the past few months. She said since 1996 the government has waged a campaign of elimination against NLD members, which includes both imprisonment and offering NLD members financial enticements to leave the party. Many NLD members have been forced by their political activism to sacrifice economic gains to the point where they have been forced to sell their cars and homes, so these enticements have some appeal.

4. (C) Win Mya Mya said that in recent months Mandalay authorities have been actively trying to squash NLD operations by boarding up NLD signboards at three separate locations and homes and refusing to grant permission for large gatherings. The NLD has worked around this by using its members' homes. She said authorities tried to restrict attendance at recent NLD meetings to 50. She refused, but promised NLD would take care of security and would not make inflammatory speeches. Five hundred NLD supporters subsequently gathered peacefully with no interference. Meanwhile, in a nearby township, government authorities have attempted to befriend NLD members in an attempt to infiltrate and neutralize the party, said Win Mya Mya.

Pitting Muslims Against Buddhists

5. (C) Win Mya Mya said that the government also attempted to instigate a rift between Buddhist and Muslim NLD members. Leaflets, supposedly written by the Monks Association, were distributed on the streets of Mandalay stating that the monks should unite to root out Muslim influence in the party. In addition, the notice made derogatory references to Mya Mya Win, who is Muslim, stating "What is the NLD in Mandalay doing today... following Daw Suu Kyi's path or Kalama (derogatory word for Indian) Win Mya Mya's?" An accompanying notice, with no signature, criticizes Win Mya Mya's pride and attitude, stating, "Do not be a copycat to the daughter of a National leader, you cannot compare." (The full translated texts of both documents have been emailed to EAP/MLS desk officer Alex Barrasso.) Win Mya Mya professed to be untroubled by the propaganda, and suggested the general public understands that it is a ruse on the part of the regime. In addition, she has spoken to the Monks Association, which disavowed the leaflets. Win Mya Mya added that she has a very strong, positive relationship with the Monks Association because her family regularly sends food and other goods to imprisoned monks.

6. (C) Win Mya Mya told the Charge that the NLD appreciates and supports the recent Tutu-Havel report, especially its nonviolent approach, and welcomes the UN Security Council's taking up the issue of Burma. The Charge said that the U.S.

actively supports the initiative to have the UNSC discuss Burma. Win Mya Mya said that the NLD has sacrificed much and she requested the U.S. provide support to pro-democracy activists. The Charge responded that one of our highest priorities is to provide moral support to pro-democracy activists. She said that many in the Embassy were frustrated with the present situation and wanted to do more, so if the Win Mya Mya had any specific requests the Embassy would be pleased to consider them. Win Mya Mya replied that she was proud to hear this.

#### Local NGOs Find Ways Around the Authorities

17. (C) Mandalay YMCA and World Vision activists told the Charge that government officials recently began restricting NGOs from direct community involvement. Pending projects range from the establishment of a primary school to introducing a program on personal hygiene to children in local communities. Many Township Coordinators, who approved projects in the past, can no longer do so because their superiors have made it clear that final approval will no longer be forthcoming for any project. The climate is such that Township Coordinators are scared to approach even those authorities who might accept and approve project proposals. Even though World Vision has an MOU with the Ministry of Health to provide better health care to Burmese citizens, every new project now must receive permission to take place. If the project does not strictly adhere to the MOU, the government refuses permission. In addition, the government has made it harder to get visa extensions for foreigners working with YMCA and World Vision.

18. (C) However, the YMCA can still organize and hold various classes and workshops at their Mandalay headquarters and at its branches around Mandalay, including on topics such as grassroots organizing and leadership. The activists agreed that despite the added pressures, they would continue to make end-runs around the regime. One of the participants, who has his own travel business, said that the government recently began refusing to allow international tourists to donate school supplies directly to poor schools north of Mandalay. He therefore put in requests for supplies from the schools that happened to match the donations received, and then told the government that a local person would fill the schools' request.

#### Monastery Runs the Only Quasi-Private School in Burma

19. (C) The Charge toured the Phaung Daw Oo Monastery High School -- one of the few schools that provide an education and curriculum not entirely dictated by the government. The Monastery has a total of 5,885 students, most of whom are poor. They come from throughout Burma, including minority areas. All of the students benefit from the higher standard of training the teachers have received, and 227 of the brightest students, regardless of ethnicity or sex, are taught classes in both Burmese and English with the English courses using imported textbooks and supplementing the curriculum. U Nayaka, the abbot, said that they were given the freedom to offer extra curricula and better teaching methodologies because they fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, rather than the Ministry of Education like all other schools. However, there are only two high schools like this in the entire country and the other only uses the Burmese curriculum.

110. (C) Comment: Mandalay is the second largest city and is the cultural heart of Burma. We spoke to a variety of people willing to stick their necks out to make a positive difference in their country. They have a sense of how hard and where they can push to do more for the disadvantaged. These particular individuals are not unique. Many people throughout the country quietly strive for ways to bring change to Burma. The cumulative impact of these individual efforts can be powerful, but it may take time. End Comment. Villarosa